

# Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : Chief, Intelligence School

DATE: 24 November 1958

FROM : Chief, Clerical Training

SUBJECT: Weekly Report No. 46, 18 - 24 November 1958

1. Flexowriter: The Agency survey on the potential and actual use of Flexowriters is still being conducted. [redacted] who has charge of this project has informed [redacted] of Operations Support Faculty that a copy of the report would be given to OTR.

2. Numbers in Clerical Induction Training. During the week of 18 November 1958, there were 48 people in Clerical Induction Training. Of these, 9 were entering for the first time.

3. Numbers in Clerical Orientation Training. There were 13 people in Clerical Orientation for the week of 18 November 1958.

4. Results of Official Agency Testing Administered by Clerical Induction. The results of the tests administered to the entrance-on-duty employees for the week of 18 November 1958 were as follows:

	<u>Tested</u>	<u>Qualified</u>
Shorthand	6	0
Typewriting	17	6

25X1

[redacted] has been griping about the amount of work she and her assistant have to do. I have checked out the facts, and while she and [redacted] have been carrying slightly heavier classroom schedules than other instructors, the difference is not great, and is unavoidable.

able. It certainly doesn't warrant the  
guessing she has done.

In fact what <sup>is pushing</sup> ~~is pushing~~ her, I think,  
is that she wants to be head hen on  
the roost. I don't intend to have  
any jockeying for advantage in  
that staff; [ ] the boss there and  
I have no intention of replacing her.

Hence, I intend to see [ ]  
this afternoon, and will reprove her  
sharply for misbehaving, & tell  
her to settle down to teach. No more  
gripping. She may want to carry on up  
the line to DTR or DDTR. This is unlikely,  
but you should be forewarned.

Ek

# How Short Can a Shorthand Course Be?

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**T**HAT OLD BUGABOO, the time element, is haunting private business schools more than ever now.

In group training, the teacher is free to handle the problem by pacing progress according to prescribed lesson plans to be completed within a certain term. In individual instruction as practiced by the majority of business schools, however, the specified term of study is eliminated, since new students may enroll at any time. Here the learner is permitted to gauge the amount of work to be covered and to advance at whatever rate of speed his individual aptitude and ambition dictate. It is at this point that the issue is joined.

What is a reasonable time in which Gregg shorthand can be mastered? Into how short a period can we compress a shorthand course? To how great an extent can we accelerate our courses?

Prospective students have erroneous conceptions about acquiring shorthand skill. Here is a scene that is familiar to a registrar:

The young visitor (in this case, a high school graduate with one year of college training) explains that she has a very limited time in which to study the course. She aspires to learn stenography "in the shortest possible time." When you encourage her to be more specific, she tells you, "I hope to study very hard in order to become a secretary in one month." Confronted with pertinent facts and data in rebuttal, she will modify her statement with, "Then I surely should be able to complete the course in two months."

Is any other vocational goal sought in so short a training period as secretarial work? Why is the time element of such urgency?

One reason is that, even in periods such as the recent recession, there is still a great demand for office help. Many students of all ages are motivated to enter the labor market simply because a weekly paycheck is attractive. Others have more urgent reasons: marriage plans, supplementing the family income in these times of spiraling prices, financial commitments. Then there are the college graduates with straight liberal-arts backgrounds who are impatient to get their careers started; unable to secure the jobs that they feel they merit, they decide to obtain entry through the stenographic route. All these cases have one element in common—"Time is of the essence."

Having taught several systems of shorthand, I feel qualified to state categorically that the Gregg system is the easiest, simplest, and quickest to learn. Anyone with average intelligence can, with moderate effort, master this useful subject. But in determining the length of time required for such a course, we must consider certain aspects of the study of a skill subject.

## Some Special Factors

1. *Mental and Physical Co-ordination.* We all know that a subject like history, for example, requires only perception. A subject like shorthand, however, requires physical adaptation.

I recall a student with a master's degree in psychology who was anxious to learn Gregg quickly (since she was promised a position in personnel work) but who found advanced dictation very difficult. Why? Because she was by nature what I term a slow-paced individual—she talked deliberately, walked leisurely, responded with premeditation. Younger high school students were marching up the ladder of higher speeds while she lagged behind. A rapid learner who is handicapped by an inadequate background in English also requires more time.

2. *Period of Crystallization.* Another point to consider is the process of learning itself. There are limitations to what one can absorb in a given time. Indeed, psychologists tell us that too much cramming without time for a natural process of adaptation, or period of crystallization, often produces diminishing returns. Time should be allotted for review and practice.

3. *Quantity and Quality.* That too rapid training may result in a lowering of standards is another danger. When quantity is emphasized, quality often becomes secondary, and accuracy then takes a back seat.

4. *"Lonesome" Shorthand.* Another consideration is the fact that shorthand needs a steady companion, typewriting, in order to be serviceable. Since transcription skill is the final test of a good stenographer, training that correlates shorthand and typing development must be included in a secretarial course.

The question "How short can a shorthand course be?" reminds me of a question asked Abraham Lincoln: "How long should a man's legs be?" You all know the answer to that one: "Long enough to reach

the ground." The analogy in the shorthand field lies, of course, in goals and standards.

1. **GOALS.** Since it is more important to know where you are going than to get there quickly, let us spotlight the objective.

Last summer I experimented with a bright, eager group of high school students in a ten weeks' special stenography course. It consisted of two periods a day of one hour each, plus a minimum of two hours' homework. During that time, the students were able to complete the Simplified Manual and take between 60- and 70-wpm from text material.

Does such progress deserve kudos? Yes, because the objective—personal use: note-taking during lectures, writing of messages, introduction to secretarial work—was accomplished.

In my classes at present are a number of students whose aims are to qualify for the 80-wpm school clerk exam given by the New York City Board of Education; others have set as their goal a Drake diploma (100 wpm); a few are aiming for higher speeds to meet Civil Service requirements. Since there are many levels of secretarial work, trainees' aspirations may match any of them; differences in training periods result.

2. **STANDARDS.** Business standards fluctuate. During a period that is characterized by a secretarial shortage, standards are lowered and minimum requirements may temporarily be acceptable. But, as Alan C. Lloyd has pointed out in his informative article, "New Secretarial Opportunities" (*American Business Education*, December, 1957), "When the number of job seekers and job openings fall into balance about 1960 or 1961 (the dates pegged by NOMA), the capacity to compete will be basic to secretarial job success."

### A Fair Challenge?

The factors that I have explored concerning the nature of the study of shorthand, individual aptitude and ability, goals and standards should under no circumstances discourage a prospective trainee. I simply wish to point out that a high school student, after studying for two years (at a less intensive rate, I concede), is required to pass an 80-wpm speed test only. Is it not too challenging to expect business-school students to match or surpass that score in three months or six months, even though sessions are longer?

A number of outstanding students have succeeded in completing the course and earning a diploma in a three months' training period; but they had three (in some cases, four) hourly sessions daily, plus homework assignments. Then, too, some were taking a refresher course; and others, although they were beginners in shorthand, had a knowledge of type-writing. I contend that the average trainee should aim for the six months' course. Many will require eight months or more to fulfill goals.

Modern times demand modern methods, and speed is certainly one of the ingredients. I have used with excellent results the helpful Gregg pamphlets, "Streamlining Gregg Shorthand." If every moment is utilized, a lesson a day can easily be completed in a two-hour stenography period. As the pamphlets suggest, every sixth lesson may be omitted for sight reading. An introduction to dictation very early in the course will enliven the class and hasten progress. Dictation material is varied in conformity with the different stages of development represented in the classroom.

Up-to-date devices also play an important role in accelerating the course. Tape recorders and record players are a boon to teachers and learners alike. For the former, they act as expert substitutes; for the latter, they stimulate higher speeds.

Despite the many short cuts used, students still persist in demanding additional hurry-up methods, pleading for some technological pill to be invented in lieu of an extended training period. How can we reconcile the student's importunity with the teacher's dedication to develop each member of the class to his limits?

I've used this story about President James A. Garfield to drive home the point to some of my students:

When Garfield was president of Hiram College in Ohio, he was approached by the father of a prospective student.

"Can you simplify the course?" the father asked. "My boy will never take that in. He wants to get through by a shorter route."

"Certainly," answered Garfield, "I can arrange for that. It all depends, of course, on what you want to make of him. When God wants to make an oak, He takes a hundred years; but when He wants to make a squash, He requires only two months."

"I don't want to rush through shorthand, but I surely should be able to complete the course in two months."

TYPICAL  
BUSINESS-SCHOOL STUDENT

"When God wants to make an oak, He takes a hundred years; but when He wants to make a squash, He requires only two months."

JAMES A. GARFIELD

*Business schools don't require a hundred years to teach shorthand the way it should be taught; but they shouldn't turn out two-month "squashes"*